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SUBJECT: UNSC: MIDDLE EAST CONSULTATIONS: SOUTH AFRICA AND
COSTA RICA UNSUCCESSFULLY TRY FOR GAZA PRESS STATEMENT

REF: A. STATE 124112
[1](#)B. USUN NEW YORK 967

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The UN Security Council held its monthly briefing and consultations on the Middle East on November 25. Under Secretary-General Pascoe briefed on the "landmark" Quartet meeting November 9 with the two parties. He stressed that the biggest challenges to a lasting peace agreement are developments on the ground, such as the rocket and mortar fire from Palestinian militants which threaten Israel and the crossings into Gaza. He emphasized the need for Israel to facilitate movement of humanitarian supplies and UN personnel into Gaza. He noted the progress in the West Bank which is undercut by continuing Israeli incursions, obstacles to movement, and home demolitions. Member states largely reiterated their same monthly themes on the situation, with Libya describing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza as a "crime of war" but making no mention of the militants' rocket fire. The French called for another Quartet meeting before the end of the year. The South Africans called for a press statement on the humanitarian situation in Gaza using language that Council members had agreed to for the Council President's November 24 statement at the Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The U.S. and Croatia voiced opposition since that language had been agreed to use only at the November 24 event and did not reflect the totality of the situation. The South African proposal failed to gain consensus. End summary.

U/SYG Pascoe's briefing

[1](#)2. (SBU) In his November 25 briefing to the Security Council during a meeting on the Middle East, Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe reviewed the "landmark" Quartet meeting in Sharm el-Shaykh on November 9 where the Quartet principals had been briefed jointly by Israeli FM Livni and PA President Abbas. He said the initiative of the two parties to jointly brief the Quartet is an "important precedent for more active involvement of the Quartet in the future." While Pascoe noted that the negotiations are substantial and promising,⁸ he said that domestic Israeli and Palestinian politics are complicating negotiation efforts. He highlighted that Livni's failure to form a coalition government was due in part to differences over Jerusalem. He noted the SYG's call on Hamas and all Palestinian factions to "work urgently to reunify the Gaza Strip and the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate PA."

[1](#)3. (SBU) Pascoe stressed throughout his briefing that developments on the ground remain the biggest challenge to building lasting peace. Pascoe referred to the 123 rockets and 118 mortars fired by Palestinian militants into Gaza or at the crossings between Israel and Gaza, repeated the SYG's condemnation of rocket and other attacks by Palestinian militants on Israeli civilian targets, and urged an end to the rocket fire and a respect for the "calm." He detailed

the November 18 and 20 discussions between the SYG and Prime Minister Olmert and Foreign Minister Livni, respectively, to express his concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza. Pascoe said the SYG had repeated his condemnation of the rocket fire but stressed that Israel must uphold humanitarian principles. He noted the SYG's November 14 and 21 public statement urging Israel to facilitate the freer movement of urgently needed humanitarian supplies and of concerned UN personnel into Gaza, and emphasized that "measures that increase the hardship and suffering of the civilian population of the Gaza Strip as a whole are unacceptable and should cease immediately."

14. (SBU) On the West Bank, Pascoe noted the reported arrests of over 350 Hamas affiliates in the West Bank and stressed that suspects detained on criminal or public security grounds be treated with full respect for human rights and the rule of law. Pascoe said that despite the PA's security efforts in the West Bank, the IDF had neither reduced the number of its incursions, highlighting the approximately 400 search campaigns during the month, nor reduced the 630 obstacles to Palestinian movement. He noted that Israel resumed demolitions of Palestinian houses and structures after a six-month moratorium in Area C. He urged a cessation of house demolitions and that no unilateral action be taken in Jerusalem that would undermine confidence or alter the status quo. On the positive side, he referred to the GOI's November 2 announcement to cease funding illegal outposts in the West Bank. He addressed Israeli attempts to dismantle outposts near Hebron and noted senior Israeli officials' condemnation of settler violence.

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15. (SBU) Pascoe did not touch on Lebanon, given the November 26 Council consultations on UNSCR 1701 (reported septel), but did note Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry's November 24 meeting with Syrian officials in Damascus. He said that Serry discussed regional developments and expressed support for the continuation of indirect Israel-Syria talks. Pascoe highlighted recent discussions of the Arab Peace Initiative and termed it a "vital platform for reaching the goal of a comprehensive regional peace." He commended King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia for his efforts that led to the convening of a UNGA high-level meeting November 12-13 under the &Culture of Peace8 agenda item (septel) and the many Middle Eastern leaders who attended. He also noted the full page advertisements placed by the PLO in Israeli newspapers to promote the Arab Peace Initiative among the Israel public. He stressed the importance of the Quartet continuing to push the peace process forward in this time of transition and said the SYG has urged President-elect Obama to engage early in the Middle East.

Member states reiterate same monthly themes during consultations

16. (SBU) During Security Council consultations that followed, most member states reiterated their same monthly themes on the situation (see ref B for the previous month's readout). The Libyan DPR, speaking first, described the suffering in Gaza as a "crime of war" and a "crime of humanity" and made no mention of the Palestinian militants' rocket fire on Israel. The French Political Counselor urged a more active role for the Quartet and cited the importance of the last Quartet meeting. He called for another Quartet meeting before the end of the year, a call which the Belgian representative reiterated. The South African DPR recognized Israel's right to self-defense in response to the rocket attacks but said that there should be no disproportionate use of force or violation of the rights of innocent civilians. The UK DPR specifically called for the reinforcement of the period of calm in Gaza, for Hamas to move toward PA President Abbas on the Quartet's conditions, and for Israel to re-open

the crossings to Gaza and permit the sustained delivery of humanitarian assistance. Ambassador Wolff delivered the U.S. remarks (drawn from ref A), highlighting the November 9 Quartet meeting and the briefing by the two parties on their bilateral negotiations and stressing that the immediate cause for the humanitarian situation in Gaza is Hamas' continued instigation of violence towards Israel.

South Africa calls for press statement
on humanitarian situation in Gaza;

17. (SBU) South Africa, in response to an approach from the Palestinian Ambassador prior to the briefing, proposed that the Security Council President (Costa Rica) read out two paragraphs to the press from his November 24 speech for the Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, specifically the paragraphs on the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the need for a return to the "calm." (Note: The Security Council President gives remarks each year at the Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Those remarks, while not considered a Presidential statement, are still negotiated within the Council and agreed to by consensus. End note.) Indonesia, Burkina Faso, Vietnam, China, and Costa Rica supported the South African proposal. In his national capacity, the Costa Rican President asked how the Council could provide a complete speech the day before on a subject but not be able to offer a short press statement the following day. Ambassador Wolff was the first to comment against the proposal, noting that he could not support a selective and partial reading of those remarks. He specifically noted that the remarks were drafted solely for the November 24 event and that the U.S. did not join consensus as a formal Presidential statement or a press statement. The Croatian PR also spoke specifically against the South African proposal, stating that any press statement must reflect the totality of the situation, including the recent efforts on the peace process, not just the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Council fails to reach consensus
on Gaza press statement

18. (SBU) After all of the statements, the Libyan DPR suggested adding a third paragraph to the draft statement reiterating that the parties must avoid actions that could undermine confidence and could prejudice the outcome of

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negotiations. The Deputy PolCounselor reiterated Ambassador Wolff's earlier comments that, given that the remarks were agreed to for a particular purpose, the U.S. would have to seek instructions before being able to join consensus on a press statement. The Croatian DPR reiterated Croatia's earlier concerns that the draft press statement lacked the appropriate focus on the actual peace process. At the end of consultations, the Costa Rican Presidency concluded that there was no consensus on a formal press statement but noted that the Presidency could exercise its prerogative to answer press questions. After the meeting, PolCounselor spent thirty minutes pressing the Costa Rican Charge not to refer to the November 24 remarks when answering questions from the press. After receiving instructions from his capital to remain silent on the issue, he relented.
Wolff